

alzheimer's association[®]

Good morning, Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Maria Tomasetti, and I have been working for the Alzheimer's Association of Connecticut for approximately three years. I am currently the South Central Regional Director for the Association. I am also a former family caregiver for my mother who had dementia of the Alzheimer's type.

I am here today to testify in support of **Raised Bill No. 989, An Act Concerning the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program.**

The Alzheimer's Association is a donor supported, non-profit organization serving the needs of families, health care professionals, and individuals affected with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The Association provides information and resources, support groups, education and training, and a 24-hour, 7 day a week Helpline.

The Connecticut Statewide Respite Care Program is funded by the State Department of Social Services and is operated in partnership with the Alzheimer's Association, Connecticut Chapter and the Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging. The Connecticut Statewide Respite Care Program currently pays for up to \$3,500 in respite care services per eligible family, per year. Respite care provides a break, or a time of caregiver relief, from the constant physical and emotional stress of caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Eligible families may apply for daytime or overnight respite care services including: Adult day center care, home health aide, homemaker/companion, skilled nursing care, or a short-term inpatient facility stay.

The individual with dementia must meet income and asset eligibility requirements -- with income of no more than \$30,000 a year and liquid assets of \$80,000 or less. As one of the primary caregivers for my mother who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, I can speak first hand of the daily demands of care giving and the importance of getting a break from care giving responsibilities -- both for the caregiver and the person with dementia. Our family utilized personal care assistant services for 3 ½ years on a private

pay basis. The use of personal care assistant services -- for help with activities of daily living -- gave us the break we needed to continue to care effectively for mom at home. We were able to keep mom home because of these personal care assistant services. Personal care assistant services are not inexpensive. The average cost of a personal care assistant is \$13.80 an hour (gross). We were paying over \$15.00 an hour. Families with income and/or assets slightly over the current State Respite program limits would not be in a financial position to pay privately for needed respite care services, adding to caregiver stress.

Prior to my new role as the South Central Regional Director, I coordinated the Alzheimer's Association Helpline services for approximately 2 ½ years. I volunteered on the Helpline for nine months prior to joining the Association. During this time, I was able to refer many eligible family caregivers to our Connecticut Statewide Respite Care Program. These family caregivers, often tired and overwhelmed, were relieved and happy to learn about the possibility of a break from care giving responsibilities. While serving our Helpline clients, I encountered other family caregivers, equally tired and overwhelmed, who were initially hopeful about some respite care through the State Respite program and then disappointed and frustrated since their income and/or assets were slightly more than the program's eligibility guidelines. These families were not financially able to pay for needed respite care. There are other families in this same situation who are aware of the financial eligibility guidelines and simply do not inquire or apply.

Lastly, families are most appreciative of the \$3,500 in respite care services per family, per year, which is currently allowed under the State Respite program. At the same time, the Area Agency on Aging Respite Care Managers work closely with families and are very aware of families with special needs who are in need of additional services. Some flexibility in the program maximum for these special situations can only increase the effectiveness of the State Respite Program.

The Alzheimer's Association, Connecticut Chapter supports the following changes to the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program so the program can help the families it was designed to help.

Increasing income and asset eligibility limits, which have not changed in 11 years, to reflect cost of living adjustments

Allowing flexibility to increase the respite grant maximum for families with special circumstances through regulation changes

Allowing use of personal care assistants as a respite care option

Thank you.